

CONNECTICUT STATE FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

February 16, 2017

Senator Larson; Senatore Kelly; Representative Scanlon; Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee.

RAISED BILL #5207 - AN ACT IMPOSING A SURCHARGE ON CERTAIN PERSONAL RISK INSURANCE POLICIES TO FUND REGIONAL FIRE SCHOOLS' OPERATING BUDGETS AND CERTAIN FIREFIGHTER TRAINING COSTS.

My name is Vaughan Dumas, President of the Connecticut State Firefighters Association. Our Association represents approximately 26,000 paid and volunteer firefighters in Connecticut. I would like to comment on the subject bill on the agenda for today's public hearing.

The Connecticut State Firefighters Association requests that you support Raised Bill 5207. The proposed bill for a surcharge in insurance policies will generate enough revenue for the nine (9) fire schools to operate efficiently without adding a burden on the state or municipal budgets. The funding for the regional fire schools across the state has continuously declined over recent years causing a hardship which results in the reduction of training being delivered. The loss of financial support caused fire schools to operate with sub-standard equipment, inability to maintain facilities, and raise the student fees having a direct impact on local budgets.

The Education Committee is a subcommittee of the CSFA. The Chairman reports to the CSFA Board of Directors at quarterly meetings. This committee represents the Nine (9) regional fire schools across the state, members consist of two representatives from each fire school, the Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, and a board member from the CSFA. The regional fire schools are used by career and volunteer firefighters for initial firefighter training, continuing educational classes, and mandated annual recertification training.

As a result of the operating funds budget cuts to \$20,000 to each school, the cost of training had to be raised. Student fees for Firefighter I training had to be increased of nearly 80% over the last three years.

- \$500 in 2014
- \$850 in 2015
- \$1,150 per student which generates \$28,750.

The budget cuts caused a serious financial burden on the regional schools rendering most of the schools in financial difficulty. One school was forced to close for the winter in 2015 because of a lack of funds to pay for heat and utilities. Schools have had to reduce the number of courses being delivered and decrease the amount of student contact hours, while instructors at other schools have elected to work voluntarily without compensation because there is not enough revenue to sustain instructor salaries.

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The amount of funds needed to run a class of 25 students in a firefighter I course is \$29,035.00. The costs are broken down in this manner;

- \$18,000.00 in salaries (\$20.00 p/hr)
- \$2,160 for income tax
- \$1,625 for testing fees to the state (\$65 per student)
- \$3,850 for live fire training evolutions
- \$2,500 for textbooks
- \$900 in workman's compensation coverage

At the current fee schedule, the revenue generated is \$28,750.00 which is \$285.00 short of the funds required to host a class. In addition to this shortfall, there are other expenses to keep a facility operating such as utilities, equipment, and property liability insurance. On average a fire school operating budget is \$250,000. The state budgeted amount of \$20,000 per school is not enough revenue to host classes, pay salaries, maintain a facility, and pay fees such as utilities and insurance to keep a facility open.

The lack of funding has caused all of the schools to use inferior equipment that beyond the date of service, instructors to use firefighter turnout gear issued to them from their departments which leads to passing on the replacement to a municipality, and being unable to afford to have equipment properly inspected and maintained.

Fire Training and continuing education for firefighters is important and it is not an option. Statutory law, specifically Conn OSHA 1910-156(c) (2) makes firefighting training, continuing education for persons in a position of supervision and annual live fire training mandatory. It is unreasonable to expect the members of 324 fire companies comprised of nearly 26,000 firefighters across the state, to meet certification standards required by law without regional fire training school facilities to train in.

There are three bills proposed so far this year that address the need to generate funding for the operating budgets of the fire schools, HB 5089 / HB 5207 *** / SB 538. While there is no public language available for the presented bills, we are familiar with proposed bill 5207 as it mirrors the language in 2016 bill number 5518. The studies conducted last year revealed that the revenue generated by that proposed bill would be able to provide all the funding needed for operating costs at the regional schools and pay for firefighter training, which will result in reducing the burden on municipal budgets.

We realize this bill is pending approval and we are respectfully asking that you consider passing this raised bill so that the burden of the revenue required to fund the fire schools is taken away from the state budget.

Respectfully,

Vaughan I. Dumas
President CSFA